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AUTHOR Blackwell, Jacqueline
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ABSTRACT

Good early childhood programs serve as a foundation for socialization and the building of skills, while complementing a child's development during the formative years. If the community would mount forceful campaigns to make early childhood education what it should be, millions of dollars might be saved on remedial programs. In an effort to save programs for young children, educators must organize advocacy groups to lobby for financial support. Individuals and community groups must force legislators to consider the rights of children and to act to preserve them. In planning, evaluating, and implementing early childhood programs, it must be remembered that these programs should provide a challenging and flexible curriculum so that young children develop to their fullest potential. (Author/WI)

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An Examination of Some Urban Implications

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By

Jacqueline Blackwell, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of
Early Childhood Education
Indiana University
School of Education
Indianapolis/Bloomington, Indiana

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Early Childhood Education: An Examination
of Some Urban Implications

For many years, the leadership within early childhood education has advocated the need for and the importance of quality educational programs for young children. Those same leaders have loudly voiced their concerns and positions to legislators, businesspersons, scholars, and general public. The response to these educators has been seemingly weak. During 1979, which marks the 20th anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly, the following challenge, made to the nations of the world, will be offered to individuals concerned about the needs, rights, and well-being of young children: identification, implementation, and evaluation of realistic goals for children. In addition to this challenge, educational leaders must direct considerably more attention to those dilemmas facing early childhood programs (i.e., children enrolled in nursery schools, day care centers, child development centers, and kindergarten ages 2 to 6) in urban settings.

The purpose of this article is to examine those dilemmas facing early childhood programs in urban areas. More specifically, the writer will discuss the impact of community, finance, politics, and accountability upon early childhood programs in urban settings. Additionally, procedures will be outlines throughout the article to assist in the furtherance of quality educational programs for young children.

Community Impact

As one examines the dilemmas facing early childhood programs, careful attention must be given to questions raised by the urban constituency.

These questions are: (1) What is the value of early childhood programs for young children? and (2' How will these programs benefit the family and the community? Turning to question one -"What is the value of early childhood programs?" Leeper (1978) states that good early childhood programs offer young children the opportunity to live, fully and richly their formative years, and they invite and nurture children's excitement about learning.

Good early childhood programs encourage young children to "try on" life, to experiment with the environment, to acquire new methods for expressing feelings and understandings, to interact with adults and peers, and to acquire new information through inquiry, experimentation, observation, listening, and reading (Headley, 1965). Serving as a foundation, these early experiences provide the opportunities necessary to develop the skills needed to become a contributing member of society and ultimately a life-long learner.

Now, addressing question two - "How will early childhood programs benefit the family and the community?" Quality early childhood programs complement children's development during the formative years by providing children with the kind of care they receive from their own parents and by providing for children meaningful, social experiences with competent, concerned adults and with peers while parents work outside the home. Early childhood programs strengthen family ties by building upon the strengths (i.e., culture, language, and history) that the young child brings to school. These strengths are of peculiar importance when programs exemplify a multi-cultural approach to instruction. If one witnesses what has been happening in this thrust during the 1970's, the multicultural thrust has directed community attention to the preservation and extension of cultural roots,

building upon the many strengths that urban, young children bring to the educational setting. Programs, oriented towards cultural enrichment, provide opportunities for children to study the similarities and differences among cultures within the community. For urban settings, a multicultural emphasis would enable early childhood programs to go beyond the usual superficial attention given to various cultures and offer a more realistic reflection of the various lifestyles and customs found in the community, resisting the popular tendency of viewing cultures and subcultures as "fixed, unchanging, archetypic."

Community support of early childhood programs would allow community members, many of whom are heads of households, to maintain themselves and to become self-supporting members of the community without the support of public assistance, thus, increasing the list of independent community members. During the past 30 years, many urban women have returned to the labor force. The largest increase in employment of these women occurred among mothers with children under age 6, rising from 14 percent to 40 percent (U.S. Department of Labor, 1978).

If the community will mount forceful campaigns to more programs for young children from the bottom of the education agenda to a position of a priori, we may be able to save millions of dollars on remediation. Young children deserve the chance for quality programs. Young children have the same expectation for an education as older children and also expect a fulfillment of their individual abilities. These efforts will contribute in positive ways to their development.

Community satisfaction with the answers to their questions will determine whether early childhood programs will be able to solicit commitment to and support of programs for young children. Community support working through appropriate legislative channels can result in enactment of bills increasing financial support for early childhood

programs in urban settings.

Finance

> Public education in the United States is predicated on the assumption that all people should be given adequate education at public expense and be allowed the opportunity of further educational attainment commeasurable with individual needs and desires (Alexander et. al., 1969, p.1).

If one examines the federal constitution, it is implicit that the "general welfare" clause gives Congress the right to provide financial assistance to public schools at the federal level. However, as one analyzes it further, the 10th amendment limits the authority where public education is concerned. To wit: it is stated that "the powers are not delegated to the United States; are reserved to the states respective...." Upon further examination, one sees that education specifically mentioned in the federal constitution has become a function of the various states, and their constitutions must make provisions for public education.

It is necessary for the legislatures or general assemblies of the respective states to provide an adequate financial base so as to establish those educational systems and accomplish their stated objectives. As early as 1795, various states were taking the necessary steps in order to finance and establish systems of public school education in this nation. From this rudimentary genesis to the present, state legislatures have provided this support.

Currently, one of the financial concerns has been that of Proposition 13 and its subsequent effect on the field of education. During the past year, Americans have been reacting strongly to the

tax revolt movement spearheaded by Congressman Howard Jarvis of California. They have been loudly calling for limitations on spending and/or taxing whose resultant factor is a disproportionate amount of burden being placed on those communities located in urban areas. This explosive political movement has created serious problems for early childhood programs, one of the more recent concerns of the school curriculum.

In responding to the tax revolt movement, early childhood educators have raised these questions:

1. Do we want quality programs for all young children or do we want to provide programs for a small, elite group of young children?
2. Can we afford to spend millions of dollars for remediation as we demand a limit on spending or do we lobby for consistent, financial support for early childhood programs?

In an effort to save programs for young children, educators must organize advocacy groups (i.e., parents and concerned others) to lobby for financial support that will allow administrators to provide the resources needed in order to develop and continue programs for young children. Educators, also, must loudly voice concern about the position that programs for young children occupy on the agenda as the school priority list is organized and reorganized.

Politics

> ...Sometimes when I get home at night in Washington I feel as though I had been in a great traffic jam. The jam is moving toward the Hill where Congress sits in judgment on all the administrative agencies of the Government. In that traffic jam are all kinds of vehicles...There are all kinds of conveyances for example, that the Army can put into the street - tanks, gun carriages, trucks... There are the hayricks and the binders and the ploughs and all the other things that the Department of Agriculture manages to put into the streets... The handsome limousines in which the Department of Commerce rides...the barouches in which the Department

> of State rides in such dignity. It seems to me as I stand on the sidewalk watching it becomes more congested and more difficult, and more difficult, and then because the responsibility is mine, and I must, I take a very firm hold on the handles of the baby carriage and I wheel it into the traffic.
>
> Grace Abbout
> Chief, U.S. Children's
> Bureau - 1934
> (Children's Defense Brochure, 1978)

In addressing dilemmas facing early childhood programs in urban settings the impact of politics must be considered, if strides are to be made to promote the need for and importance of programs for young children. Individuals concerned about the need, rights, and well-being of young children must advocate and organize more effectively, following the examples set by the Education Commission of the States and the Children's Defense Fund, if positive gains are to be made on behalf of all young children. The Education Commission of the States, established in 1966 as a national organization of state policy makers, has been spearheading the states' movement into the child development field, and this organization has tried to help states learn how to unite their voices for children by directing political attention to key issues (Allen, 1974). Although the Education Commission of the States has been quite successful in its efforts to benefit children, we also need to being together local, state, and regional people who care about children to exercise their power. Until this happens, public policy for young children, especially those who are under age 6, will not reflect public need.

In addition to the Education Commission of the States, the Children's Defense Fund (1978), organized in 1973 as an out-growth of the Washington Research Project, was created to provide systematic and long-range advocacy on behalf of children. The Children's Defense Fund (1978, pp.10-11)

provides an informal voice for children in an effort to make adults in key positions consider:

1. Children's needs are urgent and cannot wait.
2. Children are the nation's future.
3. Prevention is more humane and cheaper than remediation.
4. Our national response to children is a test of our decency.

Following the strategies of the Education Commission of the States and the Children's Defense Fund, concerned individuals must mount campaigns that make scholars, businesspersons, legislators, and general public aware of the dilemmas facing early childhood programs in urban settings and solicit consistent support from individuals and organizations in the forms of attending hearings and/or meetings, voicing concerns to legislators, and/or contributing financial support.

Accountability

As one continues to examine early childhood programs in urban settings, the accountability question must be raised. Accountability has been and continues to be an established trend even more so in 1979. It is readily observable that 33 states have passed some form of accountability and/or minimum competency requirements legislation. Although it has been validated by many courts that "education is a fundamental interest of every citizen," the duty of government to see that means are provided remains somewhat unfulfilled. However, until education is ruled by the courts as being a fundamental right for all-age children, then those leadership persons involved with early childhood education, will have to become more cognizant of the duties toward their student learners and be prepared to defend their program's curriculum to show how they are furthering the aims of early childhood education

Quality early childhood programs must strive to provide a wide variety of developmental opportunities which encourage young children to explore, interact, and experiment with their environment. Early childhood programs, striving to meet the needs of the child, supplement the home and community by offering experiences which cannot be so easily provided and by affording opportunities for children to interact with adults and children outside of the immediate and extended family in direct and indirect ways.

Contemporary educators recognize early childhood programs as a part of the continuum which represents the process of learning and recently have urged that gains made in the pre-school years can be reinforced during the primary years. The goals of the early childhood programs should encompass educating the whole child for physical development (body and motor), emotional development (feelings and reactions), social development (interactions), and intellectual development (thinking). If educating the whole child is the main emphasis of quality early childhood programs, these programs should and must:

1. provide for intellectual stimulation and language development
2. promote a positive self-concept
3. promote curiosity and creativity
4. foster health and physical development
5. promote social competence
6. help young children establish self-discipline and self-control

Quality early childhood programs advocate teaching as much reading, literature, social studies, music, physical education, creative dramatics, and science as each child is developmentally ready. However, the key is

teaching them in real, meaningful, and useful ways. Young children want to learn; they do not want to continually "get ready" to learn. Early childhood programs can and should be places where children are challenged, their needs are met, and they actively participate, thus, contributing skills and learning (Hymes, 1968).

In planning, implementing, and evaluating early childhood programs, one must realize and remember that early childhood programs must be more than preparation for formal schooling. They must provide young children with a challenging and flexible program so they can develop to their fullest potential.

Summary and Futuristic Considerations

In this article, attention has been focused upon early childhood programs by addressing those factors that are relevant to urban settings. The impact of community, finance, politics, and accountability were examined.

If early childhood programs are to survive during a period of limited and reduced financial assistance, demonstrated commitment must be made to young children by politicians, professionals, parents, and general public. We must not assume a middle of the road posture. We must decide whether we will fully support or not support Early Childhood Education. If we reflect upon history, in many instances, it has generated despair not hope. Lerone Bennett, a writer, says it very succinctly in The Shaping of Black America, to wit:

> A nation has a choice. It chooses itself at fateful forks in the road by turning left or right, by giving up and the taking, in the deciding and not deciding, the nation becomes.... For the decision once made, engraves itself into things, into institutions, nerves, muscles, tendons; and the first decision requires a second decision...and it goes on and on, spiraling in an inexorable process which distorts everything and allienates everybody (Bennett, 1975, p.61).

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